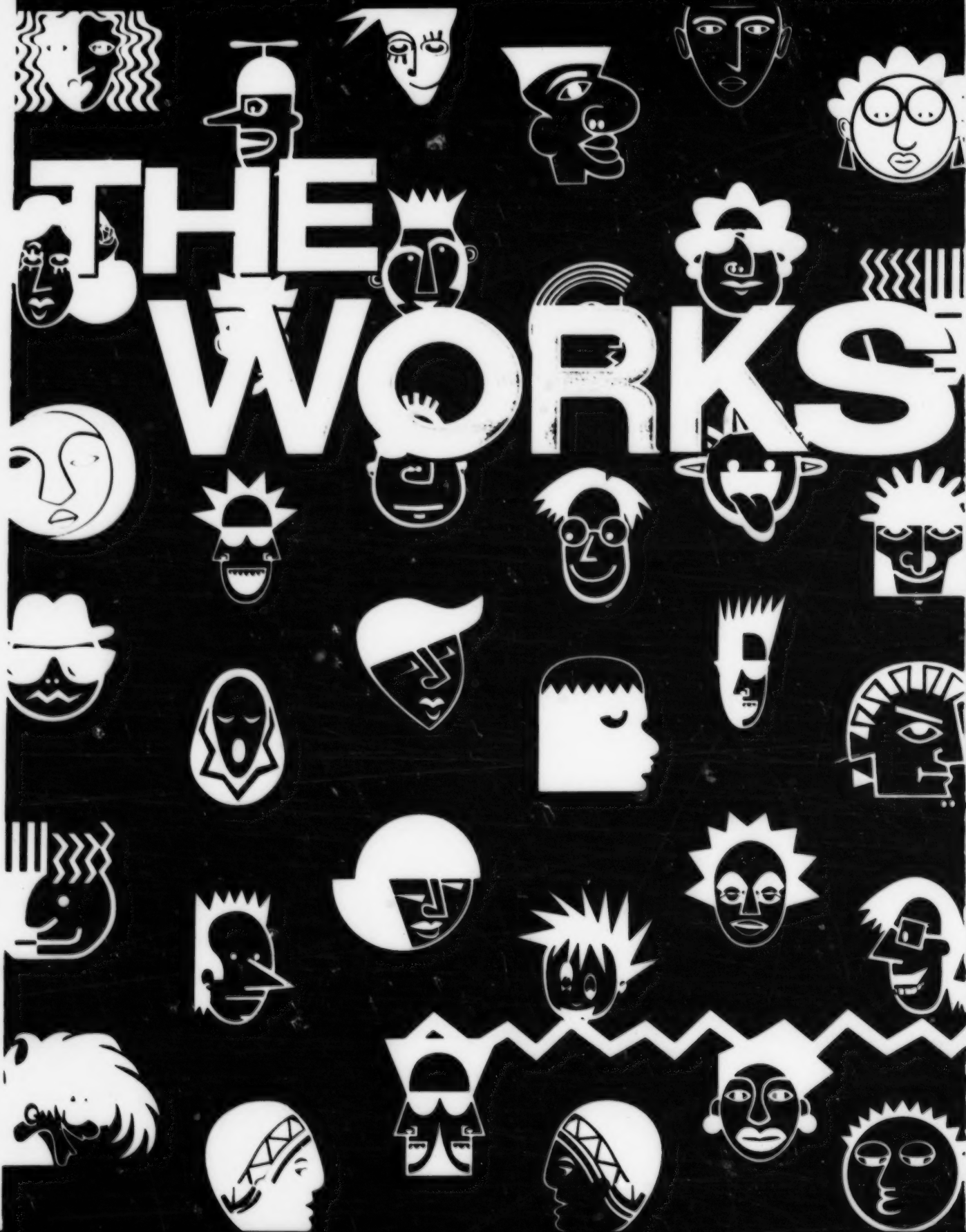


Assessing Youth Involvement in Youth Health Organizations



The Works

Assessing
Youth
Involvement in
Youth Health
Organizations

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This project is
to celebrate
youth who
take
ownership and
leadership of
their well-
being, and the
adults who
work with
them.

Together they
create a
mutual
mentorship.

The Mainland South Teen Health Center at J.L.Ilsley High School would like to send our thanks to:

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The Works: Assessing Youth Participation in Youth Health Organizations

September 1999. Prepared by donalee Moulton and Barbara Cottrell and The Mainland South Teen Health Centre for Health Promotion and Programs Branch, Atlantic Region, Health Canada.



Discussion Paper

Youth Participation in Youth Health Organizations

This paper discusses the meaning of the term 'youth driven', and the advantages, disadvantages and appropriateness of youth participation. It also provides information about legal issues surrounding youth involvement in youth health organizations. A core assumption is that youth participation is essential.

Youth health organizations are diverse. They serve different communities and operate under different philosophies, but there is a shared commitment to providing the best possible service to young people. Most organizations that offer health services to youth consider themselves 'youth driven.' However, there are wide variations in the definition of the term. 'Youth driven' can range from youth having an equal say at all levels of the organization, to adults providing services based on what they have heard from youth about what services the youth need. The key issue is how much and at what level youth participate in organizational decision making.

What Are 'Youth Health Organizations'?

In Nova Scotia there are twenty-one youth health centres and a number of new centres are at the planning stage. Most centres offer basic nursing care to youth, and some level of programming, such as events to recognize the national day for family violence prevention, and events to promote information about the centres. Administrative tasks such as record keeping, meetings and reports are common to all centres. The major differences between the centres are in the details of their operations, and in their location. Some youth health centres, for example, offer pregnancy testing and take blood for HIV tests while others do not; some are located in schools, while others are in buildings in the down town area.

Youth Health Centres in Nova Scotia

Amherst Regional High School, Amherst
Beechville, Lakeside, Timberlea Teen Health Centre
Cobequid Teen Clinic, Lower Sackville
Cobequid Education Centre, Truro
Dartmouth High School, Dartmouth
Eastern Shore District High School
Glace Bay YHC, Glace Bay
Halifax West High School, Halifax
Mainland South Teen Health Centre, Halifax
New Waterford YHC, New Waterford
Northside Youth Help Centre, North Sydney
Musquodobit Rural High School, Middle Musquodobit
Phoenix Centre for Youth, Halifax
Shelburne Youth Health and Support Centre, Shelburne
Sir John A. MacDonald High School
Sydney Youth Health Centre, Sydney
Tantallon Youth Health Centre, Tantallon
The Red Door, Kentville
The Open Door, Wolfville
The Green Door, Cambridge
The Polka Dot Door, Auburn

In Nova Scotia
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Youth Health
Centres.

A number of organizations, such as Planned Parenthood and the Boys' and Girls' Clubs, offer physical and mental health services to youth and may also be considered youth health organizations. There are many similarities in the structure of youth health centres. Most of the centres provide nursing services and programs to youth, are governed by a Board of Directors and have paid staff who are answerable to the Board of Directors.

The Levels of Youth Participation

There are many ways youth can participate in an organization. In *Working with Young People: A guide to youth participation in decision-making* (1995,II-7) these are defined as:

- a) Youth assigned to specific roles and informed about why they are being involved.
- b) Youth consulted and informed about how their input will be used.
- c) Adults initiate youth involvement and share decision-making.
- d) Youth initiate and direct projects.
- e) Youth initiate projects and share decision-making with adults.
- f) Jointly-initiated projects with shared decision-making.

Definitions of the term 'youth driven' often assume that to 'drive' an organization, youth must take part at all levels of decision making in the organization. The levels at which youth can become involved in youth health organizations include:

Level 1: Service users, and this includes reading materials such as pamphlets and posters, getting band-aids or birth control pills, or visiting the centre when medical or therapeutic advice is required;

Level 2: Management assistance, such as helping with events by setting out chairs and decorating the hall, helping advertise events by creating and putting up posters;

Level 3: Management as paid staff or on advisory committees; in program planning and organizing. This could also include giving talks to classes, planning activities such as cookie day or guest speakers, fundraising for the centre and representing the Centre at meetings;

Level 4: Members of the Board of Directors, developing policies and programs that respond to the needs and assets of the youth.

It is now commonly accepted that people should have a voice in decisions that affect their health. It would be unthinkable to have a women's health organization which does not include women at every level of decision making. There is considerable debate however, about how appropriate it is for youth to participate in all of the various levels of youth health organizations.

All youth health organizations need the participation of youth at the service provision level (Level 1). Youth participation is key to success because without the active involvement of youth, there would be no use of the services provided and the organizations would have no reason to exist. At this level, participation does not imply decision making, other than youth making the decision to use the services of the organization, or not to use the services of the organization.

Some youth prefer to get more involved than just using the centre. They give management practical support such as helping with events by setting out chairs and decorating the hall, and helping advertise events by putting up posters (Level 2). This level of participation also does not involve anything more than the most basic level of decision making.

Youth health organizations also need input from youth about the programs and services offered by the centre (Level 3). This usually involves consulting with youth about the services and programs offered because without the opinion of youth, the adults involved cannot be sure - with any degree of confidence - that they are meeting the needs of young people, providing the services they need and developing a responsive, effective youth health organization. In some cases, youth have a different perspective on the issues

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that affect them and they can tell the adults if the services of the organization are valued by youth. However, for this to occur, youth must be in an environment where their opinion is valued.

Many of the youth health centres in mainland Nova Scotia seek the opinion of youth by distributing one-page surveys. For one month in every year, for example, the Mainland South Teen Health Centre asks every youth who visits the centre to fill out a customer satisfaction survey. The Phoenix Centre regularly leaves a short survey on the coffee table in a central place in the lounge area of the Centre and many youth fill them out. Another method of accessing youth opinion is to have regular meetings with youth. While these surveys and meetings do not promise to make changes based on youth opinions, they do promise to take youth opinion into consideration. Youth report that they appreciate being asked their opinions. A number of youth health centres also have advisory committees made up of a combination of youth and adults. The function of the committees is to recommend to the centre staff and board program planning and organizing changes. At this level, the youth still do not have decision-making power, but their opinions have to be acknowledged or they soon stop offering any opinion at all.

Some centres invite youth to take leadership in the organization by doing such things as giving talks to classes about the centre, and taking part in planning activities such as open houses or inviting guest speakers. Fundraising is also done by youth in some centres. This usually involves activities such as having car washes to raise money for trips and conferences, rather than writing grant proposals to sustain the centre.

A number of centres include youth at the Board of Directors' level (Level 4). The number of youth involved varies. Some centres believe having one or two youth on the Board means that youth have a voice in policy decisions. Others believe that because adults have more power than youth, there needs to be a critical mass of youth before the youth have a voice in a group of adults. Concern has been expressed that Board functions are boring and alienate youth, and youth often do not show up or are silent at meetings. However, many adult Board members also have difficulties of focus, commitment and participation at times. Because Board development activities are so important, it is necessary to make sure that the activities we offer for youth to get involved are challenging and interesting, and that youth are given appropriate training and support so they can engage in the process. In some centres, youth have had an equal say in the hiring of paid staff. Where youth have been involved they have been considered a valuable asset in the hiring process.

The Benefits of Youth Participation

Youth should be involved in youth health organizations. Some organizations believe that decision-making is implicit in youth participation:

Youth participation involves recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of young people through the provision of real opportunities for youth to become involved in decisions that affect them at individual and systemic levels. (Working with Young People: A guide to youth participation in decision-making: 1995, 1-3)

In the same publication, the mutual benefits of youth participation assume youth are involved in decision making:

Young people and adults bring different skills and knowledge to decision-making. Youth involvement in decisions which affect them provides important opportunities for young people and adults to learn from each other, and develop more effective responses to youth issues. (Working with Young People: A guide to youth participation in decision-making: 1995, 1-9)

Some adults believe that it is the right of youth to participate in decision-making matters about their lives, and being involved in decision-making improves their health:

When people experience a sense of control over their environment and feel able to make real choices, their quality of life and health status improve. (Working with Young People: A guide to youth participation in decision-making)

The 'equal-say' aspect of the term is also implicit in the working definition of 'youth driven' used by the Community Youth Network Working Group in Newfoundland:

Youth driven indicates that youth are involved in all aspects of the organization including but not exclusive to working on the board, in management, on staff and as participants in the development and evaluation of the work of the organization.

At the same time, youth can make a valuable contribution to the organization. They contribute their ideas, perspectives, feelings and skills, and help adults involved in the organization to stay current with the issues teens are discussing in the school halls and on down town streets. Youth know what topics youth will be interested in. They can inform adults how to present the topic to youth. Even a topic like sexual health will not attract young people unless it is packaged appropriately. New programs are often built around the needs of youth that are identified through youth input. As one adult put it, "Youth know what youth need." And a youth said: "It's hard for adults to relate. Times change. We may not know policy and budget but we know our needs."

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organizations.

Youth also contribute very concretely to the amount of work that is accomplished. One teen said, "The Teen Health Centre couldn't accomplish nearly as much without us. There is no way (our nurse) could do everything we are all doing." In utilizing youth, the manager and/or paid staff are freed to spend their time with the youth who need their attention. It does take time and resources, however to organize volunteers, even when they are an integral part of the work. Youth are also well positioned to spread the word about the services and programs offered by the centres. Many youth come to the centres because they hear about them from other youth. It is also true that "the more people involved the better. Nobody hurts the organization by being involved. Everybody brings something different."

Participation is circular: it can empower youth, who then contribute to the organization in a variety of levels and ways. Through participation, youth learn skills and self respect that they will take with them through life. Youth involvement, then, becomes a central component in building community - whatever the nature, shape, or size of our particular community - and securing the future of our communities.

The reasons why youth are involved in a decision-making capacity in their local organization can be divided into two categories: benefits to the youth, and benefits to the organization. The benefits to youth include:

It is necessary for youth and adults to look for ways to increase youth participation in health organizations.

- it makes school more interesting for the youth;
- it brings the youth together with other youth they would otherwise never interact with and helps them break down stereotypes,
- it provides them with the chance to think critically about their own activities
- it gives them opportunities they would not otherwise have, such as serving on a Board of Directors, speaking to university classes and attending conferences,
- they develop new skills such as public speaking, organizing events, producing brochures and coordinating projects
- it can be reflected in their résumés
- they gain self-confidence
- opportunities to share with, learn from and partner with adults

The issue of belonging, or not belonging, is central to many teens' behaviour. It is not surprising that teens who do participate in their local youth health centre say that they feel respected and listened to, while the youth who do not participate feel they are not listened to and their opinions are not valued. As participation is an indicator of a sense of inclusion, or belonging, it is necessary for youth and adults to look for ways to increase youth participation in health organizations.

In short, youth participation is beneficial to the organization because:

- it helps staff and volunteers identify the specific needs of the youth to be served;
- youth can identify for staff and volunteers important psychosocial and sociological needs of youth as health care consumers;
- youth involvement in organization and delivery of services will result in a better informed group of youth who will know about and make use of the available services;
- youth can be additional resources so more work can be done and more is achieved by the centre - with youth for youth; and
- involved youth become involved adults.

The Appropriateness of Youth Decision Making

The degree of youth involvement begs the question whether participating at all levels is sufficient, or if youth should have decision-making power at all levels of the organization. In other words, how much leadership and control should youth have? The level, extent and nature of youth involvement depends on the goals, philosophies and context of the organization.

An ideal may be to have youth manage and operate their own organizations in equal partnership with adults. However, youth are young, usually inexperienced and may lack some of the necessary skills. This is why mentorship is central to the success of youth-driven organization.

At youth health centres, professionals such as nurses who can appraise medical problems such as an asthma attack or broken arm or social/emotional problems such as potential suicide, are hired for their expertise. The appropriate role for youth is participating in the development of policies and programs and to be part of the hiring of a person with the necessary skills to provide the services.

Some adults involved in youth health organizations believe youth are indispensable to the organization but are under involved and under valued. Others believe that this is not realistic and that youth are not interested in the 'big picture' of organizational policy. There are differing opinions about how youth should be involved. Most organizations are looking to find the balance that is right for them.

How much leadership and control should youth have?

Legal Issues

The legal issues surrounding youth involvement are fuzzy. This is particularly true around the issue of young people sitting on a Board of Directors. The legal voting age is 19. The by-laws of the Registry of Joint Stocks in Nova Scotia, where non-profit organizations must register, state that individuals under 18 cannot have a vote on a Board of Directors.

The Societies Act which governs non-profit organizations states that "A person under the age of 19 may be admitted as a member, or appointed to any office therein, of a society and shall be liable for the payment of dues or subscriptions, and every member shall have a vote." It also states that "Subject to the by-laws of any organization, the members may nominate or elect any member to serve on the Board of Directors."

Another issue to which there are no clear answers is that of 'contractual obligations.' Minors who have not reached the age of majority, which is 19 in most provinces, can revoke consent to a contract. This means that - unlike adults who sit on Boards -- they can't be held legally accountable for their decisions or their signature. Contracts between youth and organizations may not be legally binding, but they are usually very meaningful to both the youth and the organization they serve.

The Benefits of Assessing Youth Participation

Whatever the benefits or challenges of youth participation, there is value in assessing the level of youth participation in our organizations. A good assessment is an extremely useful tool to manage ongoing work, identify successes and plan effectively for new initiatives. It also enables you to determine if youth are involved in all the different levels of your organization. If done well an evaluation can:

- highlight how successfully your youth health organization has involved youth
- provide feedback to inform decision-making at all levels so you can work to further include youth, or know precisely why this is not appropriate
- assess the effectiveness of different strategies and approaches for including youth
- promote learning about which strategies, approaches and initiatives work well in your organization and which ones don't
- serve as a guide for future projects and programs for young people
- increase the effectiveness of project and program management
- contribute to organizational and policy development, and
- help you be more accountable to young people and other stakeholders.

We do need to be mindful about who is assessing youth participation. It is not sufficient for adults to decide how youth are involved. Youth also need to be involved in the assessment process.

It is not sufficient for adults to decide how youth are involved. Youth also need to be involved in the assessment process.

Taking a Look at Attitudes

It may be helpful as part of the assessment for groups to discuss how youth are viewed by the organization. In *The Technology of Prevention Workbook*, (1992, p. 32), William Lofquist describes a spectrum of attitudes ranging from "people viewed as objects" to "people viewed as recipients" to "people viewed as resources." He notes that, "At times, depending upon the circumstances, any of the three attitudes may appear to be appropriate. Becoming sensitive to this can be important for understanding behaviour and in relating constructively with other people."

Conclusion

Ultimately, the issue is one of balance. While it is unrealistic to expect youth to behave as adults and to expect youth to have the experience and leadership skills necessary to control an organization, it is not wise for adults to totally control organizations without listening to and involving youth. For youth to perform tasks, they need the necessary training. Youth and adults have a great deal to offer one another. In the words of the World Health Organization (1990):

Adolescents and young people are no longer children, but they are not yet adults. They need both support and opportunities to develop their expanding psycho-social and physical capacities and, when given a chance, they make an essential contribution not only to their own healthy development but also to that of society as well. (Cited in Working with Young People: 1995, I-3)



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An Evaluation Framework

What?

The purpose is

The purpose of this guide is to provide youth health organizations with a tool they can use to look at youth involvement and participation.

It is meant to help you think about:

- how youth are involved
- how youth could be involved
- how youth should be involved

Youth take part in organizations in a number of different ways and at various levels:

- as users of the services
- in program planning and organizing
- on the Board of Directors.

This guide is to help you identify the ways youth participate in your organization and assess whether this level of participation is appropriate for your organization.

"Youth know what youth need. It's hard for adults to relate. Times change. We may not know policy and budget but we know our needs."

This guide will walk you through a study of what your organization is about (philosophy, goals and context) and opportunities to change. After you revisit where you came from and what you do, this guide will help you look at the many ways youth are involved including:

- reading posters and other information on bulletin boards
- using the service to get a band-aid or birth control
- helping with events by setting out chairs and decorating the hall
- helping advertise events by designing posters and giving talks to classes
- raising funds for the organization by organizing a barbecue or selling raffle tickets
- joining groups that plan activities such as cookie day or guest speakers
- serving on an Advisory Committee



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- serving as a member of the Board of Directors

It will also help you figure out if you are:

- involving youth in activities that are challenging and interesting
- providing youth with the training necessary to do what they want to do
- involving youth in planning and decision making, and
- providing an opportunity for youth to think critically about their own activities.

This guide will help you assess how much youth participate in your organization and at what levels. It will also encourage discussion around what it means for an organization to be youth driven.

"Youth driven" indicates that youth are involved in all aspects of the organization including but not exclusive to working on the board, in management, on staff and as participants in the development and evaluation of the work of the organization.

Community Youth Network Working Group, Newfoundland

We've tried to make this guide an easy-to-use, effective tool for assessing the nature and scope of youth involvement in your organization. There is not one way to do this. This guide offers a number of options and ideas you may wish to use. Checklists are provided to highlight key activities and facilitate the evaluation process.

This guide is for

This guide is intended for:

- youth
- adults
- youths
- teachers
- coordinators
- administrators
- board members

It also offers suggestions for ways organizations can make changes to strengthen the level and type of youth involvement. Any organization that involves youth may find it useful.

The information you gather may also help when you are applying for funding. It will help you have a clear understanding of your organization and the role of youth.



Why?

Testing your assumptions

Assessment allows you to paint a clear picture of your organization so that you can make positive changes. It is amazing what you can learn about yourself.

An assessment gives you the ideal opportunity to identify how you think things work, and then test these assumptions.

The benefits are

A good assessment is an extremely useful tool to manage ongoing work, identify successes and plan effectively for new initiatives. If done well, it can:

- highlight how successfully your youth health organization has involved youth
- provide feedback for informed decision-making at all levels so you can work to further include youth, or know precisely why this is not appropriate
- assess the effectiveness of different strategies and approaches for including youth
- promote learning about which strategies, approaches and initiatives work well in your organization and which ones don't
- serve as a guide for future projects and programs for young people
- increase the effectiveness of project and program management
- contribute to organizational and policy development,
- help you be more accountable to young people and other stakeholders.

An assessment gives you the ideal opportunity to identify how you think things work, and then test these assumptions.

The players are

It is important to involve all of the key stakeholders: youth, directors, sponsors and staff. You may also wish to involve teachers, guidance counsellors, parents and members of the medical community.

It is not enough, however, merely to involve people in the process. They must be an integral and welcome part of the process. Everyone must feel they have an important part in the evaluation process and are not just window dressing. To achieve this, they should be actively involved as much as possible in all phases of the evaluation process: design, data gathering, implementation and review.

We feel our voice is heard. We feel our suggestions are used.



The model is

This guide uses a participatory, or empowerment, model that emphasizes involvement of key groups at all stages of the process. This increases pride and ownership. It emphasizes reflection and self-evaluation, and allows different voices to be heard so that different perspectives and diverse experiences are valued.

Principles of a participatory approach to assessment

The goal of participatory assessment is a positive experience. The key principles of this approach, adapted from *Keeping on Track, An Evaluation Guide for Community Groups*, produced by the Women's Research Centre in Vancouver, are outlined here.



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Participatory assessment focuses on learning, success and action. An important question to ask is what you learned, what worked and what did not work. Then you need to ask how can you use this information to move to action. The people and groups most directly involved decide what determines success.

The assessment is useful to the people who are doing the work that is being assessed. The organization's goals and objectives – what the project intends to accomplish – must be the standards against which the work is measured. You must pay special attention to the organization's specific needs and the available resources.

The assessment process is ongoing and includes ways to let all participants use the information from the evaluation throughout the project, not just at the end. The material produced for the assessment must be given back to the participants on an ongoing basis in a format that is useful and clearly written in plain language.

Recognition of the progression of change – in knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour – is built into the assessment. To measure people's success in changing knowledge, attitudes, skills and behaviour, think in advance about the kinds of changes you might like to produce. It is important to describe how these changes can be recognized and measured in a way that is possible and practical within the timeframe and resources available to your organization.

Participants need to develop the specific project evaluation questions, the indicators of success and realistic timeframes.

Participatory assessment makes it possible to recognize shared interests among those doing the work, the people the work is designed to reach, the project funders and other stakeholders. It must include information and input from the people doing the work, the people who the work is designed to help or reach and the project funders.



Getting Started

There are thirteen steps to follow when assessing youth participation in your organization:

1. Forming a Working Group.
2. Looking back at your history.
3. Looking at what you do.
4. Looking at how you are doing.
5. Planning your research.
6. Gathering information.
7. Deciding who to talk with.
8. Asking the right questions.
9. Recording the results.
10. Revisiting the process.
11. Interpreting the results.
12. Making changes.
13. Celebrating your work.



There are thirteen steps to follow when assessing youth participation in your organization.





1. Form a Working Group

Someone, – or some group – has to assume responsibility for guiding the assessment process. There are lots of small details and big issues that will need to be addressed. We recommend you set up a Working Group of five to eight people who will coordinate the process. This group should have the time and energy to meet regularly throughout the entire assessment period. It has the main responsibility for overseeing the project.



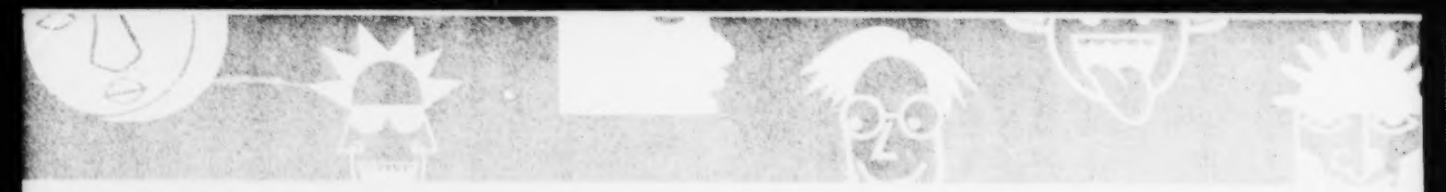
Identify key people for this committee. Determine who is involved in your youth health organization, who will be affected by the assessment, who will use the information from the assessment, who will make changes as a result and who will be affected by these changes. Key stakeholders include: youth, staff, board members, community representatives and funders – but make sure they have the time to give to this project.

This group should reflect, as far as possible, the community served by the centre and as far as possible should include youth from minority groups. Diversity is an important consideration. Remember that it is often difficult for people who feel isolated in a group to raise their voice and we suggest more than one member of a minority group be included. For example, if Black youths form less than 10% of the population served by the youth health organization, you may think one out of 10 Black people in the group is fair. It is, however, exceedingly difficult to speak your truth if you are one Black person in a group of nine white people.

Once your Working Group is formed you need to hold a brainstorming, get-to-know-each-other and share-our-understanding-of-the-organization session. This is an important opportunity to discuss why you are conducting an assessment, what you want to learn and how you want the process to unfold. It also helps to begin building trust and respect among the members of the group.

See Appendix A and B for more information on this topic.

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2. Look back at your history

When the Working Group is formed, you can hold your first getting-to-know-each-other and sharing-our-understanding-of-the-organization session.

Start with building a picture – then and now – of your youth health organization. Knowing your history, that is, how you came to do the things you do, helps you understand where you are today.

- Does everyone in the Working Group know how and why the organization was started, and by whom?
- Which members of which communities were involved?
- Where did the money come from?
- What changes have happened since the beginning?

Answering these questions will help the group have a clear picture of the organization – and a shared understanding so everyone's on the same page – of how you came to work the way you do, the ways in which youth participate now, and how youth participated in the past.



Checklist

The members of your organization and your Working Group might like to discuss these questions to get a good sense of where the organization has come from, where it is now and where it wants to go. They will also stimulate discussion about group members' attitudes towards the involvement of youth:

- Why was your youth health organization established?
- How does it operate?
- Who funds it?
- How has it changed?
- Who's in charge?
- How are youth currently involved? Why?
- What role do youth play in programs, policies and products?

Stimulate discussion about group members' attitudes towards the involvement of youth.

3. Look at what you do

Think about all programs, administrative activities and services that you provide. List them in a chart:

PROGRAMS	ADMINISTRATION	RATING

Think about all
programs,
administrative
activities and
services that
you provide



4. Look at how you are doing

To make programs and services better you need to review what is going well and what could be going better. Take the previous chart and rate your programs, administration and services and have each member rate each line as: no need to change (+), minor change (*) and needs improvement (-)!

PROGRAMS	RATING

ADMINISTRATION	RATING

SERVICES	RATING

It may be helpful to draw an organizational chart or be creative and draw a picture that represents your organization.

What does your organization look like?

Now is a good time for you to identify the ways in which youth are involved in the things you do. You may want to go back and look at Step 3 to help jog your memory. The following chart may be helpful.

What You Do	Role of Youth

Look at your ideal, that is how you want the organization to work.

Once you have the history of your organization, and a picture of how you think it currently operates, you may want to look at your ideal, that is how you want the organization to work. This may not be exactly the same as how it is working. For instance, you may never have really discussed precisely what percentage of the Board of Directors you want to be youth, or you may have decided that ideally youth would form at least 50% of the Board of Directors, but in spite of your best attempts, you think there are only 30%.

REAL	IDEAL

It is important to have a clear picture of what you want, and what you actually think is happening before you begin to gather information about other people's thoughts and views of the organization. The following chart may be helpful:



5. Plan your research

The next step is to plan and conduct the assessment to check your thinking: is the organization working in the way you think it is working and in the way you want it to?

To conduct a useful assessment of your youth health organization there are three tasks you need to complete:

1. Develop realistic and clear project goals.

This is another way of saying, list what information you want to gather. You start with a statement of goal such as: To identify the ways youth participate in your youth health organization, the levels at which they participate, the reasons they do or do not participate and the barriers to further participation.

Then you write out the actual questions you want answered. Sample questions are listed in Appendix C.

2. Develop an action plan, including who will carry out the actions and when.

Your action plan will list how you will gather the information. It may include searching the library for resources on the topic, holding focus and discussion groups, talking to individuals in telephone and in-person interviews, and conducting a survey.

3. Define the roles and responsibilities of the people involved in the evaluation.

It is important to identify who will do which pieces of work. It is often helpful to have a chairperson who will make sure the work is done.

Everyone should be provided with a list of tasks called a Task Sheet. This should include a description of the task, the name of the person responsible, the date by which the task is to be completed, and to whom the completed work should be given.

These sheets should be dated so everyone can see at a glance what is the most up to date task sheet.

Some youth health organizations discover that their ideal is 50% youth involvement on the Board: they think they have 30% and, in reality, only 20% of the Board are youth.

An example of a Task Sheet:

Task	Person Responsible	Completion Date	Report to
Call list to ask if they will take part in:			
(a) a focus group on Tues., May 3rd or	Sally	Monday, June 3	Patricia
(b) a telephone interview	Sally	Monday, June 3	Patricia
Locate suitable room for May 3rd focus group.	Freda	Monday, June 3	Patricia
Call people on Sally's list to confirm focus group place, time	Patricia	Friday, June 7	Group at next meeting, June 8.
Date:			

A Task Sheet for you to use can be found in Appendix D.

6. Gather information

As a starting point, gather all the relevant information that you can and discuss this as a group. Take a good look at your own records.

- How many programs and activities do you organize each year?
- How many are youth involved in?
- How many fundraising activities are held each year?
- What role do youth play?

In addition, take a look at other sources of information. This could include documents from your high school and the local community, as well as studies done by other youth health organizations across Canada. There is no point in reinventing the wheel. Identify what information you can incorporate into your project and what will be useful to you throughout your assessment process.

Your group may wish to use an outside researcher, if funds permit. If this is the case, it is essential that you clarify the consultant's roles and responsibilities.

A list of questions to consider when hiring an outside evaluator can be found in Appendix E.



The next step is to identify what information you will have to collect from scratch. This can involve anything from holding a focus group with six people to sending a survey to 600 people. The more formal the process the more expensive it will be, and usually, the more removed it will be from direct involvement between you and your target audiences. Questionnaires, for example, if properly prepared and distributed, can yield reliable and valid data. However, they do not build trust or encourage an exchange of ideas. They can also be expensive and time consuming.

We therefore recommend you gather your information through focus groups, discussion groups and interviews. You'll get useful information and you'll also be able to build trust with everyone involved.

You may be looking for a variety of information, such as:

- In what ways and at what levels do youth participate in your organization?
- Why youth are not participating at all levels?
- Do you want youth to be more involved?
- In what ways could youth be more involved?
- How can youth be involved in more appropriate ways?
- Are certain groups of youth not participating in your organization? Why not?

Once you've determined that you want to assess youth participation in your organization, and you have narrowed down precisely what you want to know about youth participation and why it's important to know this, the next step is to identify:

- what information you need
- where you can get it
- how it will be collected.

The information you gather will depend on your goals and on the information currently available to you.



The information you gather will depend on your goals and on the information currently available to you.



7. Decide who to talk with

You want to hear from as many representatives of as many stakeholder groups as you have the time and resources to reach. You have to be realistic. You can't listen to everyone. You only have so much time and resources such as energy and money – and after a certain point you are unlikely to gather significantly new information.

You want to hear from as many stakeholder groups as you have the time and resources to reach.

There are two steps in this process. First, list the stakeholder groups, then set a specific timeframe for data collection – one month is reasonable -- and determine how many groups, individuals and organizations you can realistically get feedback from within that time.

Identify what groups you need to meet with. This will vary according to the nature and context of your organization. Youth health organizations, for example, that are located in a high school will involve teenagers who go to that school. A youth health organization that is located in a community setting will want to involve youth from a number of high schools.

There are key groups you need to meet with. These include:

1. Youth who are involved in your youth health organization.

It will be helpful to find out why youth do get involved in your organization. You can bring together youth involved in your organization and ask them to talk openly with you about how they got involved and why they stay involved.

Please see the Research Guide for focus group questions. These are some of the answers we received when we asked youth these questions:

- It makes a big difference in school; school is more interesting.
- It brings different groups together.
- It helps us meet new friends.
- We're given a lot of opportunities we wouldn't otherwise get, such as serving on a Board of Directors, speaking to university classes and attending conferences.
- We develop new skills such as public speaking, organizing events, producing brochures and coordinating a project.
- It looks good on my résumé.
- You gain self-confidence as you do this.
- We make a valuable contribution.

The Teen Health Centre couldn't accomplish nearly as much without us. There is no way (our nurse) could do everything we are all doing.

2. Youth who are not actively involved in your organization or not involved at all.

It will also be helpful to find out why youth do not participate. You can locate youth who have never been involved in the organization and ask them to talk with you about why they're not involved. You can find these youth, for example, at your local high school, Boys and Girls Club and the local mall.

These are some of the answers we received when we asked youth:

- Busy with other things like playing sports, doing schoolwork, working part time and hanging out with friends.
- Didn't know there were opportunities to be involved other than as a user of the service.
- Uncomfortable with the 'Youth Council' type of youths who are often involved in the running of a youth health organization.

They're close to each other. You feel like an outcast.

- Intimidated by the other youths involved.
- Not feeling useful; feeling there's "nothing for me to do."
- Not knowing, or not liking, the other youths involved.
- Disliking school and wanting to get out as soon as possible at the end of the day.
- Feeling their opinions didn't matter or weren't valued.

A special effort needs to be made to include all youth in the evaluation process. Aboriginal, Black and other visible minority youth need to be included, as well as youth representing disabilities, gays and lesbians. Separate focus sessions can be held with these groups, especially if you serve a large number of these youth. Personally inviting input from individuals is highly effective. It demonstrates respect and interest, do not underestimate this. However, it is generally recommended that they be included as part of the regular focus groups with youth.

3. Adults who are involved in your organization, including board members and staff.

It will be helpful to find out why adults feel it is, or is not, important to involve youth in the organization. You can bring together adults involved in your organization and ask them to talk openly with you about how they get young people involved. These are some of the answers we received when we asked adults these questions:

- New programs are built around the needs of youth. It's important to have input at all levels.
- Young people identify their own needs.
- Some kids have no reason to come
- Some young people come to the youth health organization because it's more anonymous.
- Youth know what youth need. It's hard for adults to relate.
- The more people the better. Nobody hurts the organization by being involved. Everybody brings something different.
- It's easier for youth to spread the word.

Aboriginal,
Black and
other visible
minority youth
need to be
included, as
well as youth
representing
disabilities,
gays and
lesbians.



8. Ask the right questions

The two most commonly used methods of gathering information are interviews and surveys.

Details about how to conduct research can be found in the Research Guide.

9. Record the results

Making careful notes about what you are hearing is an important part of the research process. For more information on this please see the Research Guide.

10. Revisit the process

As you move through your evaluation you need to assess how well you're doing. Is the information you're gathering helpful? Is it relevant? If the answer is "yes" you're on the right track and may need only minor modifications to your process. If the answer is "no" it's time to step back and look at what you hope to learn. Then it's time to revamp your process.

Often you find you haven't actually asked the right questions so it's no wonder you're not getting the information you need. Other times you're asking the right questions but to the wrong people. Sometimes it's a bit of both.

Be rigorous. Bring a critical eye to assessing what is working and what isn't. Ask participants for feedback. Ask people involved in other youth health organizations. Ask each other. Assessment is a process of doing and redoing, planning and replanning, acting and reacting.

It's hard to write down on paper the calibre of work these (young people) do. They present at teacher in-services. They talk to public health nurses. Everybody's too keen.



11. Interpret the results

When you are planning your focus groups and individual interviews, have a clear plan for what you will do with the results. Imagine all the information and reports in front of you and imagine precisely what you will do with them.

You have amassed a great deal of information. Now you need to know what the information is really telling you. You need to organize, study and analyze the data. This can be time consuming, and hurrying the process leads to frustration. Allow yourselves plenty of time to organize and study the results.

One way to start is to have your questions in front of you and begin to make lists or grids of the answers. This helps to get a mess of information clearly organized. For example, you could list all the answers you received to each question. It may be useful to do this on flipchart paper so everyone in the group can take part.

Sample list of answers to the question:

How are you involved in the Youth Health Centre?

I'm not.

Not much.

I go and get an aspirin when I have a headache.

I fell down the stairs once and the nurse took me to the hospital.

I'm on the Planning Team but we don't do much.

We helped put out the chairs for the December 6th event.

A friend and I put up posters once.

I sit on the Board of Directors.

I sweep the floor.

I greet people at the door.

I help raise money.

Once all the answers are listed you can begin sorting them. It may be helpful to use a grid so you can see at a glance what youth say about their participation in the organization. A grid could look like this:

Services Use	Promotion	Teams, Board, Committee Work
I go and get an aspirin when I have a headache.	We helped put out the chairs for the December 6th event.	I'm on the Planning Team but we don't do much.
I fell down the stairs once and the nurse took me to the hospital.	A friend and I put up posters once.	

You need to know what the information is really telling you.

You may want to list what it is about the youth health organization that the youth say makes them feel particularly welcome.

Services, Events	Positives	Problems	Action
Cozy room drop-in centre	A great place to be when you're not feeling well.	I don't go in if there's anyone in there I don't know.	Make youth feel more comfortable
December 6th vigil	Nice to know people care	It helps to know other people feel the same way as you. You're not alone.	I didn't go, the topic was too heavy.
Find ways to locate and support youth who have difficulty with these types of topics.			

Keep a running list of comments made that do not fit in your lists or grids, but do require further thought. These can be discussed later.

Note: In research people often give apparently contradictory responses. You may find explanations for these if you think the issue through, or ask for further explanations. For example, if youth say they do not participate and have no contact with the organization, then go on to describe some involvement try to find out why they don't perceive this as participation. You may find the answer interesting.

I certainly felt that I was involved and it felt really good.

In one Health Centre, a young woman said she had never taken part in any Centre events. Later she described the experience of reading a poem she had written to a very large group of youth and adults at a lunch-hour vigil held in memory of the women massacred in Montreal – and in memory of neighbours who had been murdered recently in their community. When she was asked if that wasn't participating in the Centre she said, "Well, I guess so. I'd never thought of it like that before. But I certainly felt that I was involved and it felt really good."

One of the aims of this assessment is for you to think through the pluses and minuses of having youth participate in all levels of your organization. You have listed what youth and adults have said about this. Now is the time to analyze the answers. You may want to do it like this.

Why Youth Get Involved	
Youth (+)	Youth (-)
It's looks good on my résumé.	The kids on the Youth Council run everything.
It increases our self-esteem.	When the bell rings I'm outta here.
We like to contribute to our school and our community.	I don't know any of the people in the health centre
It helps to know other youth have similar problems and you're not alone in this.	I have a life. I don't have time for this.
It makes us feel good about ourselves to be involved.	I don't know how to get involved.
Youth like to have a say in what's offered.	I don't want kids thinking I'm pregnant.

Now is the time to analyze the answers.

You can then further organize the responses so you can see how youth involvement contributes to the youth's own development and to the development of the organization:

Youth (+)	Organization (+)
It's looks good on my résumé.	We like to contribute to our school and our community.
Youth like to have a say in what's offered.	Youth like to have a say in what's offered.
It helps to know other youth have similar problems and you're not alone in this.	



12. Make changes

Once you have a clear picture of your organization from the perspective of youth who are involved, youth who are not involved and from the adults who are sponsors, organizers, staff and friends, you need to make decisions about taking action.

One of the major frustrations expressed about research is that we learn about a situation but then nothing is done, nothing changes. Doing the research often raises expectations that positive change will take place.

Don't make changes for the sake of making changes. You need to have a firm idea of why you're making changes. This will depend on your goals. For example, if you want to have 50% of all presentations being made by young people and only 30% are now being made by youth, you'll want to look at how you can make changes so more young people are speaking on behalf of the organization.



Caution!

Change can be painful, so it is best done in an organized and planned way, and with as many of the players involved as possible. It is important to keep change at a healthy pace: not so slow that it loses momentum and people can't see anything happening and lose interest, but not so fast everyone feels flattened to the wall by the blast.

Caution!
Change can
be painful.

Proposed Change	Action: Yes/No	First Step	Who?
Limit the number of activities youths are involved in to help prevent the 'Youth Council types' running everything.	Possibly. Needs more study.	Form committee of youth and adults to discuss.	Mary will organize a first meeting by March 3rd.
Let us know what we can do.	Yes	Create a funky chart with the health centre's activities and spaces for volunteers to sign up.	Will be prepared by next Committee meeting.
Help us feel comfortable with the other youths.	Yes	Focus group to explore this further?	Bring forward at next Board meeting.
Organize meetings once or twice a month, not every week.	No		
Make sure no one is asked to speak about their families or personal lives in a group.	Yes	Write a draft policy statement.	Jim to draft by March 31st.
Organize a party or event such as go-karting to provide a relaxed atmosphere for youths to get to know each other and become acquainted with the Centre.	Possibly	Check how much money we have in slush fund.	Sue to report back at Board meeting on March 31st.
Find out what interests youths by having a suggestion box available.	Yes	Brian volunteered to make the box. Raoul will do a write up for the May issue of the newsletter.	Box will be ready within two weeks; next issue due out in three weeks.
Have the Staff Person invite youths personally.	Yes	Ongoing	Ongoing

Now is the time to list suggestions for improving youth participation in your organization.

Discuss which of these changes you all agree you want to begin to act on.

13. Celebrate your work

At the end of the project, celebrating everyone's work and contribution is a valuable team building activity. Some ways you can do this are:

- Throw a Hawaiian Beach party
- Have a pot luck supper with home-made fortune cookies
- Go extreme bowling at midnight
- Go on a weekend camping trip
- Have a corn boil in a farmer's field
- Go on a snowy sleigh ride and drink hot chocolate
- Have a pizza party with a '70's retro theme

Those people who took the time to be part of your assessment deserve to be told the results of your efforts.

Follow-up

Those people who took the time to be part of your assessment deserve to be told the results of your efforts. You should indicate how the information is being used, what changes are anticipated, and when you expect changes to be made.

You may wish to bring everyone together and have a thank-you party, or you can send everyone a copy of the final report along with a thank-you note. This is not only good manners it helps to maintain the trust you've built throughout the process.



What Else Do You Need to Know?

About the law

The legal issues surrounding youth involvement are fuzzy. This is particularly true around the issue of young people sitting on a Board of Directors. The by-laws of the Registry of Joint Stocks in Nova Scotia, where non-profit organizations must register, state that individuals under 18 cannot have a vote on a Board of Directors. However, the registrar pointed out that the legal "voting" age is 19.

Another issue that keeps getting raised but to which there are equally unclear answers is that of "contractual obligations." Minors who have not reached the age of majority, which is 19 in most provinces, can revoke consent to a contract. This means that they can't be held legally accountable for their decisions or their signature. For most youth health organizations this may not be a big issue.

It's best if you check with Joint Stocks in your province and a lawyer in your community. But young people are sitting on Boards, getting involved in organizations and even starting their own businesses all across this country, so it would not appear that the legal issues are a significant hindrance.

Contracts between youth and organizations may not be legally binding but remember they are very meaningful to both the youth and the organizations involved.

About consent and confidentiality

The most important ethical and moral issues in an assessment are consent and confidentiality.

Consent

The first thing you should do before you ask anyone to take part in your organization's assessment is to explain to them what you are doing, why you are doing it, and what is going to happen with the information. Provide them with a consent form to sign. A sample consent form can be found in Appendix F.

Confidentiality

It's very important to be clear about how confidential the information really is. For example, you cannot guarantee that a focus group discussion will remain confidential. While you can guarantee that you won't say who took part or what any individual said, you can't guarantee this of everyone in the focus group.

All your notes and any other identifying materials should be kept in a locked filing cabinet and not left out for passersby to see.

The legal issues surrounding youth involvement are fuzzy.



Appendix A:

Setting Up a Working Group

Who are the key stakeholders who should be represented on this committee?

Have you identified representatives for the following groups:

- youth
- staff
- board members
- organization sponsors
- community representatives

Are any other groups or individuals involved in your youth health organization who you have not identified?

Have you identified all those who will:

- be affected by the evaluation?
- use the information from the evaluation?
- make changes as a result of the evaluation?
- be affected by these changes?

Do you have representatives from minority groups on your Working Group, including:

- Aboriginal
- visible minorities
- people with disabilities
- lesbians and gays
- other

Appendix B

Forming an Advisory Team

In addition to forming a Working Group, you may want to form an Advisory Team that offers guidance, feedback and input as the assessment process unfolds. The Advisory Team:

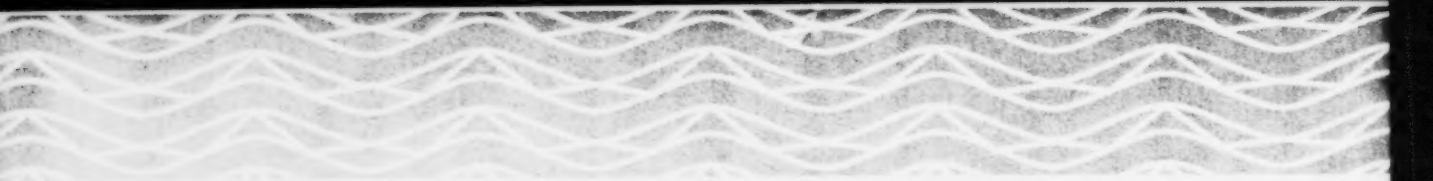
- can be as large as 12 people
- is less intense and requires a smaller commitment of time than a Working Group
- can include individuals from similar organizations or those with complementary concerns such as people from a neighbouring youth health centre or from the local heart health organization.
- gives you the opportunity to involve more stakeholders than is practical for the Working Group. Members, for example, might include young people who volunteer for a youth health organization, staff from community groups, a representative from a local hospital or clinic, and a board member from a community group

When we're here everybody feels welcome. Everybody is involved who steps through that door.

Appendix C

What Information Do We Want To Gather?

1. How are youth involved in our organization? Are they involved at all levels?
2. How do youth get involved in our organization?
3. What do youth enjoy about being involved?
4. Do youth feel they have a say in how our organization is run?
5. What keeps youth involved?
6. What keeps young people from getting involved in our organization?
7. What could we do to involve more young people?
8. Is it important that young people be involved? Why? Why not?
9. Are the youth who are involved in our organization also involved in other volunteer activities?
10. How much authority do youth have in our organization?
11. How do we reach the visible and invisible minority groups?



Appendix D

Task Sheet

Task	Person Responsible	Completion Date	Report to

Date:

Appendix E

Hiring an outside evaluator

To assist in the effective use of outside evaluators, it is helpful to answer the following questions:

What qualifications are you looking for?

What are the evaluators' strengths and weaknesses?
What projects have they worked on?
Have they worked with volunteer advisory committees?
Have you had any experience working with them?
Do you have a sample contract?
How will the evaluator be informed of progress and held accountable?

How will you work together?

What will be the relationship between the Working Group and the outside evaluator? Who will the evaluator report to?
How does the Working Group plan to handle any disputes with outside evaluators?

What will the evaluator do?

Are they going to work with your group to develop the assessment plan?
Are they going to develop some or all of the data collection tools?
Are they going to interpret the results?
Will they write a final report?

Appendix F

Sample Consent Form

I understand that (name of organization) is trying to find out how youth are involved in their organization. I also understand that information from interviews with myself and others will be used as part of this research.

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I may withdraw at any time, and may refuse to answer any question I do not wish to answer.

(Name of organization) will show me all published information that uses my words and at no time will I be identified by name without my written consent.

I understand that (name of the organization) will take notes during the discussions and these will be kept in a safe place and will not be available to anyone without my written permission. At the end of the study, the notes will be destroyed.

I know I can contact (name, address and phone number of organization) if I have any questions about the study.

(signed)

(date)



This guide will help you decide how to proceed with your evaluation. It contains details about how to set up and conduct focus groups, discussions groups and in-person or telephone interviews, and offers suggestions for the kinds of questions you can ask. It will also help you determine how to best record the information you gather. In addition, it provides tips on conducting surveys. Information on consent and confidentiality, along with a sample consent form, can be found in the Evaluation Framework.

Focus Groups

Some of the benefits of getting information from a group rather than from individual interviews, are:

- higher levels of energy that are often generated by a group
- one idea leads to another
- people spark off each other
- people speak spontaneously

The result is often rich and useful information. A skilled facilitator can get everyone in a group enthusiastic about the topic – and about talking.

Focus groups help to:

- get an in-depth understanding of attitudes, behaviours, impressions and insights on a variety of issues from a key group of people
- develop and test new ideas.
- generate ideas and suggest strategies

Focus groups are not useful, however:

- for developing consensus
- making final decisions
- allowing time for reflection

A focus group usually involves six to 12 people who are brought together in a single session of approximately 90 minutes. It is facilitated using a set of questions, similar to an interview that focuses the discussion. It is often helpful to give the group members advance notice of the topic so they have time to think about it.

Wherever possible, people should be given the option of taking part in a group session or an individual interview. Some people are not comfortable in groups, while others want to share confidential information and feel a group would not be the appropriate place.



There are
three keys to
a successful
focus group:
A good plan,
a good ear
and a good
record.

There are three keys to a successful focus group: A good plan, a good ear and a good record.

(1) A Good Plan

As informal as focus groups may appear, they should never be made up as you go along. You need to know – specifically – what questions you're going to ask. Just asking, of course, doesn't mean you'll get response. Prompting, digging, asking for examples are all part of eliciting the information you're looking for and involving the group substantially in the process.

(2) A Good Ear

You also have to listen, really listen – and show that you're listening. As obvious as this sounds, it's often overlooked. We go into a focus group thinking we know the answers and, amazingly, hear the answers we expected to hear. But this may not be what was actually said or intended. Bring an open mind – and a partner to record comments – to each focus group you hold.

(3) A Good Record

You need to write down all the key points made by participants in the focus group. See page 10 for more detail.

A Tipsheet to help you conduct effective focus groups and sample focus group questions follow.

A Tipsheet to help you conduct effective focus groups and sample focus group questions are included below.



Focus Groups: A Tipsheet

When organizing and conducting focus groups there are a number of things you need to keep in mind:

- Before you begin, have a clear understanding of what you are trying to find out.
- The facilitator must remain neutral and non-judgmental throughout the session. They must also keep the discussion moving and on track.
- Ask no more than ten questions, in order of importance.
- Don't try to rush to get to the end. If the last couple of questions don't get asked you can always hold another focus group or solicit the answers in your interview sessions.
- Encourage answers with positive feedback: smiles, nods, thank yous.
- Give people time to answer and give everyone a chance to answer. Be conscious of who's actively taking part and who isn't. Draw out those who are silent.
- Always have the questions on paper. Don't rely on your memory.
- Bring a person to record the session and write it up within 24 hours. You'd be amazed at how much more you remember.
- Be consistent. Don't pay some people to come to focus groups or have pizza at some and not others.



There are a number of things you need to keep in mind

Sample Focus Group Questions

Youth Involved in Teen Health Centres

Introductions:

The facilitator will introduce herself and the recorder, thank participants for volunteering, explain the purpose of the focus group, and encourage open discussion. Participants will then be asked to introduce themselves and explain how they are involved in the organization.

Approximate time: 10 minutes

1. How did you get involved in the THC?
Prompt: Did someone encourage you? A friend? Staff at the Centre? Teacher ?
Approximate time: 10 minutes
2. What do you enjoy about being involved?
Prompt: Can you give me an example?
Approximate time: 10 minutes
3. Do you feel you have a say in how the organization is run?
Prompt: Can you give me an example?
Approximate time: 10 minutes
4. Are you involved in other volunteer activities?
Prompt: Can you give me an example?
Approximate time: 5 minutes
5. What keeps you involved in our organization?
Prompt: The staff? A place to meet people? Important Issues? Friends?
Approximate time: 15 minutes
6. What do you think keeps other young people from getting involved in the health centre?
Approximate time: 10 minutes
7. What could we do to involve more young people?
Prompt: Physical surroundings? Promotion of Centre? Events? Raise issues?
Approximate time: 10 minutes
8. Did you enjoy being part of the focus group? Is there anything we can do to improve it?
Approximate time: 5 minutes

Wrap up.

Does anyone have anything else to add?
Thank group for their time and their input.
Approximate time: 5 minutes

Total time: 90 minutes





Sample Focus Group Questions

Youth Not Involved in the Organization

Introductions:

The facilitator will introduce herself and the recorder, thank participants for volunteering, explain the purpose of the focus group, and encourage open discussion. Participants will then be asked to introduce themselves.

Approximate time: 10 minutes



1. Did you know that young people are involved in the health centre?

How do you think they are involved?

Approximate time: 5 minutes

2. Is it important that young people be involved? Why? Why not?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

3. What appeals to you most about getting involved with an organization or group?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

4. Did you ever think about getting involved with us? What changed your mind?

Prompt: Friends? Someone else? Comments overheard? Atmosphere at the Centre?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

5. Are you involved in other volunteer activities?

Prompt: Can you give me an example?

Approximate time: 5 minutes

6. What holds you back from volunteering?

Prompt: Shy? Don't know what interests you? No time?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

7. What do you think keeps other young people from getting involved?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

8. What could we do to involve more young people?

Prompt: Physical surroundings? Promotion of Centre? Events? Raise issues?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

9. Did you enjoy being part of the focus group? Is there anything

we can do to improve it?

Approximate time: 5 minutes

Wrap up.

Does anyone have anything else to add?

Thank group for their time and their input.

Approximate time: 5 minutes

Total time: 90 minutes



Sample Focus Group Questions

Adults Involved in Youth Health Organizations

Introductions.

The facilitator will introduce herself and the recorder, thank participants for coming, explain the purpose of the focus group, and encourage open discussion. Participants will then be asked to introduce themselves and give a brief overview of their YHO, such as how it got started, how it is organized and who it serves.

Approximate time: 10 minutes

1. How are youth involved in your organization?

At what levels are they involved?

Prompt: Can you give an example?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

2. Why are youth involved at those levels?

How much authority do youth have at those levels?

Prompt: Are they encouraged to give suggestions? Do they have veto power?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

3. How is their authority explained to the young people? Do they actively use their authority?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

4. Why are young people not involved at the other levels such as board members or program planners?

Prompt: Legal reasons? Not interested?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

5. Is it desirable to have youth involved at every level? Why or why not?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

6. How does your organization get youth involved?

Prompt: Can you give me an example?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

7. How do you keep young people involved?

Prompt: Can you give me an example?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

8. Do you evaluate how your YHO is working?

How do you do this?

Prompt: Can you give me an example?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

9. Do you specifically evaluate youth involvement? How?

Prompt: Informal discussion? Agenda items? Research?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

10. What do you think keeps young people from getting involved?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

11. What could we do to involve more young people?

Prompt: Physical surroundings? Promotion of Centre? Events? Raise issues?

Approximate time: 10 minutes

12. Do you think we need more youth involvement in organizations that serve youth?

Approximate time: 5 minutes

Wrap up.

Does anyone have anything else to add?

Thank group for their time and their input.

Approximate time: 5 minutes

Total time: 130 minutes



Discussion Groups

Discussion groups come ready made or you can create them. Ready-made opportunities include:

- speaking to a Grade 10 class
- being put on the agenda of the Board of Directors' next meeting
- meeting with another group such as the executive of the local Boys' and Girls' Club
- meeting with young people at a local community club.

You can also invite a number of individuals to meet with you to solicit input and ideas. Your Advisory Team, for example, could not only help guide the process but they could also provide useful information in response to your questions.

Discussion groups can involve six to 30 people, and they are usually larger and less structured than focus groups. They do provide you with a solid opportunity to meet with people face to face, often without having to organize the meeting or invite people specifically.

Interviews

Interviews are an excellent way to meet with, or talk one to one with key individuals. They may be conducted in person or on the telephone. Some people prefer discussing their thoughts in a confidential interview rather than sharing them with a group of people. They may feel intimidated by the group, or may not trust that group members will understand what they have to say or perhaps respect confidentiality.

On the topic of youth participation, some people may be worried that their views are controversial. They may prefer to talk to you in a private interview rather than in a focus group.

When, where and how you meet is often a matter of convenience for the person. If they're the only employee in an office, for example, coming to them or calling them may be easier.

Interviews are also a useful tool for people with low literacy skills. They are usually more comfortable and it is easy to build a rapport. But an interview is more than a chat. Remember you are looking for answers to specific questions. The key is to stay on track and guide the interview - for your benefit and the participant's benefit.



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Conducting Interviews: A Tipsheet

Individual interviews are usually structured around a set of open-ended questions

Individual interviews are usually structured around a set of open-ended questions that are developed to guide the interview and to provide consistency in the information collected. It is useful process for getting in-depth information, clarifying ideas and probing for further information and detail. Remember:

- Conduct interviews with people who are knowledgeable about the subject you're evaluating, such as young people involved in your youth health organization or front-line staff.
- This is also a good approach to use with people who are more comfortable with speaking than they are with writing, or for people who may feel uncomfortable in a group setting.
- Keep bias out of the interview by asking neutral, or non-leading, questions. Also be sure your body language doesn't influence the interviewee, who will often give the responses they think the interviewer wants to hear.
- You'll need an interview guide of open-ended questions with probes. Ask if you don't understand or need something repeated don't hesitate to say so. Ask additional questions if you need something clarified.
- Encourage people to answer in their own words. Assure them that nothing they say is stupid.
- Make sure questions are clear and simple: you don't want vague or complex questions.





Recording Information

There are a number of ways to record interviews. You can record the session on audio or video tape, you can take notes yourself or plan to sit down after the session to record what you heard, or you can take someone along to take notes. There are pros and cons of each of these methods.

(1) Taping

Audio or video taping is the most accurate way of recording and you run no danger of not having a record of some of the wonderful, rich things participants say, but it is time consuming and expensive. You must have all the equipment organized in advance: know where you will get it from, and get it early enough that you can try it out. Many plans have been ruined by tape recorders that don't work.

The facilitator must obtain permission from the participants to record the session and they must be told precisely how the recording will be used and who will have access to it. It may be helpful to tell participants they can request the recording device be turned off at any time, and can ask for what they have said to be erased. But this can halt the flow of the session; also some participants will be reluctant to ask. It is critical that the decision about what to do with the tapes be made before you actually start taping.

Tapes need to be transcribed; the information on the tapes needs to be typed or written down. To do this you can use a transcribing machine, which allows you to run and stop the tape at the speed of your typing, controlling it with your foot to leave your hands free for typing. Transcribing, however, is usually done by people with transcribing skills and takes about two and a half times the length of the original meeting. So, for a two-hour tape, you can expect transcribing to take five hours. Once you have the transcript in your hands, you have to decide what to do with it. Who will read and analyze it? How?

(2) Note taking

Sometimes a facilitator will take notes as the session progresses. We do not recommend this, however. The facilitator already has a lot of work to do, making sure she is asking all the questions, keeping everyone involved and on track. Sometimes the note taking slows down the process and contributes to a less upbeat discussion.

(3) Memorizing

Planning to record what you heard later is also not recommended. It is impossible to hold in our minds all the rich and useful things that have been said. It is also hard not to unwittingly overemphasize, or downplay, some parts of the conversation.



There are a number of ways to record interviews.



The best method for recording is to have a specific person who only takes notes and will write up the report. This person should know some background about the centre and the purpose of the evaluation, but you should try not to indicate what you think people will say. Let her write what she hears, not what she thinks you want to hear. The more notes she takes the better. Encourage the recorder to bring a number of pens and plenty of paper, and write down as many direct quotes as possible. They are invaluable when you are writing your report and analyzing the material. The focus group report must be written up within 24 hours. After that time much of the richness of the tone of the discussion will be lost.



Surveys

Unless you are planning to write up the results for a scholarly journal and make claims about youth in general, surveys do not have to be systematic and you do not have to work at surveying a random sample of youth. One of the most effective ways to do a survey is to compile a list of questions. Keep it simple. The fewer the questions the better; three or four is ideal. No more than 10 is recommended. Always state at the beginning of the survey:

- who is conducting the survey
- why the survey is being conducted
- who will read the survey
- what the results will be used for.

One of the most effective ways to do a survey is to compile a list of questions.

Make the survey as bright and attractive as you can so that it captures the eye and youth will want to pick it up. Be very clear about confidentiality: do you want them to sign their names, and will you ever use that information? Let people know that you value their opinion, what they think could make a difference, and thank them for taking the time to do this for you.



One group of students at a high school in Nova Scotia wanted to find out if young people would like a teen clinic to open in the school, if they would use such a service, what they would use the clinic for and what would make them feel comfortable going to such a clinic. They designed a simple, one-page questionnaire and distributed it to all students in the school. It took the group some time to agree on the questions, photocopy the questionnaires and distribute them to all students. The response was very positive. They then sat down and reviewed the results – looking at how many people said what, and what it was they had to say. The students then presented their results to parents and teachers. An active, effective teen health centre is now up and running in the school.

Many youth say that it feels good to be asked their opinion.

The shorter the survey the more likely people will fill it out. Don't make the mistake made by one group who wanted to find out in what ways women were involved in research projects. They went to great expense and effort to design a seven-page questionnaire and mail it to 150 local organizations. They received 10 responses.

Begin your survey with a statement explaining why you are doing the survey. Make sure your questions are clear and to the point. For example, the question Are you involved in the centre? can mean different things to different people. However, Have you ever volunteered at the centre?, followed by In what ways?, is more likely to provide the information you are looking for. You should test your survey on a small group of people before you send it out to your target group.

If you want youth to pick up a survey form, instead of mailing it, leave the surveys in a common area. One organization, for example, leaves question sheets on the coffee table in their drop-in centre. A box is close-by for youth to pop their completed survey sheets into. Many youth say that it feels good to be asked their opinion and they enjoyed filling out the survey. Remember to leave lots of white space for people to write their answers.





Sample Survey

Your Opinion
Is Important
to Us!

Your Opinion Is Important to Us!

The Steering Committee of the Halifax Youth Health Centre would like your opinion about our services. We would appreciate it if you would take a few moments to answer the following questions. The survey is totally confidential. You do not have to put your name on the sheet unless you want to, and your name will not be used in anything we write about your answers.



1. Have you ever been involved in the Halifax Youth Health Centre?
Please circle one:

Yes

No

2. If yes, please tell us how you were involved:

3. Was this a good experience? Why or why not?

4. How could the centre serve you better?

Thank you. Please put the sheet in the box when you are through.
If you would like to know about the results of this survey, or about our services, please call us at 445-9078.



Getting Youth Involved in the Project and Keeping Them There

Youth should be encouraged to recruit new youth members at all times.

Try to create circumstances where the youth will feel that they are involved in a larger movement of youth in the community, region, province/territory or country. Connection to the broader picture will increase the chances that the participants will feel that their work is important.

Recruiting should be done by asking potential new members to help the project in very specific tasks. These tasks should also have a limited time frame and be feasible to do with little or no training.

The best methods for recruiting new youth to the project include:

- an invitation from another youth who is seen as a leader,
- an invitation from a friend who is already involved, and/or
- an invitation from a service provider or other significant adult in the life of the youth.

Include a representative mix of youth, remembering that those who may find it difficult to participate (e.g., single mothers) may also have the best experiences to share with the group and the project.

Youth may be more interested in staying involved with the project when:

- Training is provided;
- They are helping others;
- They feel appreciated;
- They are doing meaningful community work;
- Opportunities are provided to meet community leaders; and
- Certificates of merit, school credits or work experiences are provided.

Payment of money or tangible rewards to youth should be used when there is a job to be done that the project would otherwise hire someone to do (e.g., distributing flyers, doing surveys). Money should not be used as an incentive for youth to stay involved but as a fair and reasonable benefit for doing a job.

In projects that cover a large geographical area, having a group of youth from each location rather than single representatives from each site, strengthens the group, makes the potential for local team building better and increases the likelihood of the project continuing.

Education and skill development are most effective in the context of a real situation.

Recruiting youth who have some experience doing community work, and some understanding of their role as leaders, appears to shorten the groups development process and its work toward its goals.

The power of youth involvement will increase as youth begin to learn new skills and become meaningful participants in decision making. Likewise, their sense of control and ownership for the project will also increase. This development will require deliberate efforts, time, patience and resources. Education and skill development are most effective in the context of a real situation, allowing youth to practice what they have learned.

Youth may not stay involved in the project if:

- it is too restrictive,
- there are little or no opportunities for control or learning, it is boring,
- there are leadership problems,
- their friends have left the project,
- there is too much discipline, or
- they develop other interests.

Group development and growth appears to be an important social outlet for some of the group members. Team building, therefore, is an essential element in group development.

Tasks assigned to group members, mentors and other volunteers should be closely related to the goals, have a deadline and be achievable.

One of the most valuable skills that youth can learn through the project is conflict resolution.